

Ramsey says academics comes first

U of L president won't back arena if it takes funding from education

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — University of Louisville President James Ramsey said he supports the downtown arena site a task force has chosen but won't back an arena at all if it takes away from funding for academics.

In his annual "state of the university" address Wednesday, Ramsey said the school must get out the message that money for academics and research at U of L is as important as financing a new downtown basketball arena.

"We must communicate, and then re-communicate, to all in this community and state that it is the investment in our people, the investment in human capital, that drives true long-term opportunity for all our citizens," Ramsey said.

The Louisville Arena Task Force is scheduled to recommend the downtown site Friday to Gov. Ernie Fletcher. It would be built at Second and Main streets at a cost of \$299 million. The task force proposal calls for it to host U of L men's basketball games and other events.

Ramsey said his preference would be an arena on campus, although he supports the task force recommendation.

But he said he won't lobby lawmakers for it if it means losing academic funding.

"That's something I've got to talk to legislators about and see," Ramsey said after his address. "I can't at the expense of our academic focus."

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nents have not demonstrated an equal commitment to funding academics at the school. He declined to elaborate.

The task force also recommended that the state fair board manage the arena and that it be financed with \$75 million from the state and the sale of \$224 million in bonds.

Fletcher has said he would lobby the legislature to commit the \$75 million so long as the arena is built downtown.

U of L now plays at Freedom Hall at the state fairgrounds. The downtown arena proposed by the task force would have 22,000 seats, 70 luxury suites, a practice facility and an ice rink for a minor-league hockey team and skating shows. It would also contain a restaurant, a parking garage and retail stores.

Information from: *The Courier-Journal*, <http://www.courier-journal.com>